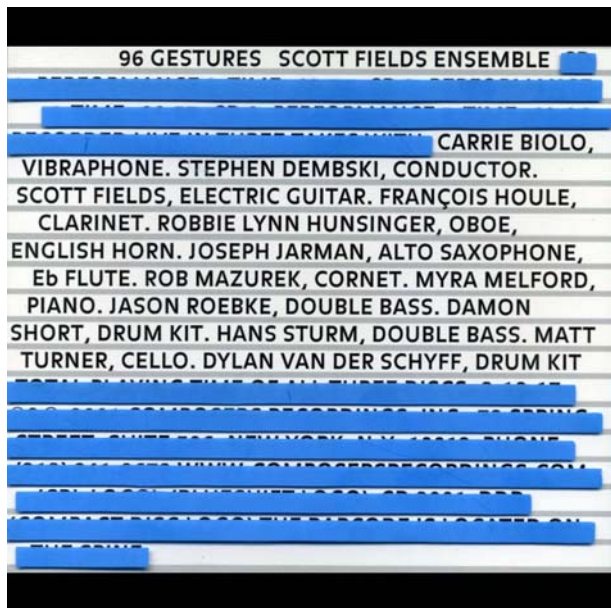


NWCR2001  
**96 Gestures**  
 Scott Fields Ensemble



CD 1. Performance 2 total playing time: ..... (68:54)

CD 2. Performance 4 total playing time: ..... (66:57)

CD 3. Performance 5 total playing time: ..... (62:26)

Carrie Biolo, vibraphone; Stephen Dembski, conductor; Scott Fields, electric guitar; Francois Houle, clarinet; Robbie Lynn Hunsinger, oboe, English horn; Joseph Jarman; alto saxophone, Eb flute; Rob Mazurek; cornet; Myra Melford, piano; Jason Roebke, double bass; Damon Short, drum kit; Hans Sturm, double bass; Matt Turner, cello; Dylan van der Schyff, drum kit

Total playing time of all three discs: 3:18:17

© & © 2000 Composers Recordings, Inc.  
 © 2007 Anthology of Recorded Music, Inc.

**Notes**

The Scott Fields Ensemble represents key players in some of North America's most significant creative-music communities, from Brooklyn (Jarman and Melford) to Vancouver, BC (Houle and van der Schyff), and from Chicago (Biolo, Hunsinger, Mazurek, and Short) to the virtual community that is scattered across America's small cities and towns (the rest of the ensemble).

Anytime I've conducted this work, I've been determined not to decide in advance what the ultimate shape of the piece would be or even how it would start. It could make the direction of this piece simpler if some decisions were made prior to the conductor's first indications. But improvisation is integral to the piece, for the conductor as well as the players.

So, with this expanse of musical material before me, I found myself plotting the future of a musical form even as I might be cueing one group of musicians to begin a gesture over the improvisation of several others. The richness of the labyrinthine relationships among the gestures magnifies the impact of choices the conductor might make. Quoting Fields, "What separates *96 Gestures* from earlier modular compositions by other artists, such as John Tchicai, Anthony Braxton, or Lester Trimble, is the combination of the independence and strong internal relationships of the modules, or gestures, As I call them. And any of these gestures can stand alone. In fact, most would serve well as 'heads' for a jazz tune. But there are also fixed relationships among the gestures.

The point of all of this is to provide a wealth of material -- literally thousands of bars of music that form an extensive lead sheet -- from which an improvising ensemble can draw to spontaneously create fresh compositions. The variations in the strength of relationships allow the conductor to create contrasts or work within close limits.

The direction of these performances is one of the most challenging tasks I've faced in music. Fields' conception is unique in my experience, and just as each person's hearing of a performance will be unique, in this work much more radically than most others, each performance exemplifies a unique piece-path.

*96 Gestures* is a vast palette of musical shapes and colors from which twelve improvising players and an improvising conductor create a composition.

The musicians who appear on this recording ...

I have known Scott Fields since 1992 and this is the third recording we have made together, including his previous modular composition, *48 Motives*, and my own work, *Sonotropism*. Although *48 Motives* shares some of *Gestures*' characteristics, I know of nothing else like *Gestures* in functional flexibility, structural scope, and relational richness. Each experience of conducting it is unique, as is the composition expressed by each performance.

When I stepped in front of the twelve musicians who played on this recording at the studio in Madison, I began scanning the more than thirty-five square feet of score displaying thousands of bars of music arranged in discrete passages. Each of these passages (or "Gestures," as Fields calls them) was notated in conventional musical staves: two of the lines were each intended primarily for one instrument, with two possible secondary (or "doubling") instruments also indicated for each. The third line was for bass and percussion. Each three-part passage—two gestures and a rhythm part—was paired with another, for a system of six lines. Each passage was identified by a numeral and a letter, each of which was pictured on the score as an American manual alphabet hand sign.

I began each performance by silently indicating to several of the musicians—through the hand signs—the gesture that he or she would play. Then I'd cue them to start playing. As I beat time I would also indicate when the musicians were to improvise and which material they should draw upon for their improvisations. For the rest of the performance, always listening to the piece's development and alert to clues about the musicians' wishes and intentions, I'd continue to signal to the members of the group who was to play what, when, with whom, and for how long.

“The strength of these relationships varies in predictable ways, tonally and rhythmically. The tonal system is Dembski's post-serial, pseudo-tonal circles system.” (As conductor, I had a leg up in this respect, since Fields had adapted for his use the harmonic system that I'd long ago developed for my own work.) “My gestures that are derived from within a set of circles are more immediately related to each other than those that are written from different sets. The gestures are also related through time signature and beat length. By working with the variations in phrase length, the

conductor can create contrasts or cohesiveness of pulsation in the tradition of Steve Reich.

“Variations in tonal sets allow for variations in consonance and dissonance. When making these choices, the conductor considers not only the effect of contrasting composed elements, but also how these choices affect the ensuing improvisations. And although decisions the conductor makes affect the directions the improvisations take, the improvisers themselves have a profound affect on the piece's outcome. The conductor must be quick on his feet, since the improvisations can quickly change the spontaneous composition's direction and with it any preplanning the conductor may have attempted.”

Improvisation is of the essence of this work, both for the individual players, and in terms of the conductor's role in determining virtually all aspects of the large-scale form of the piece, so that each new performance is what most would consider a new composition. And for his part, the composer has fashioned the gestures so that their relations can be spectacularly resonant, and in so many ways.

—Stephen Dembski

---

## Production Notes

Recorded live by Tom Blain at Philo Buck Studio, Madison, Wisconsin on December 18 and 19, 1998

Mixed by Mark Haines at Smart Studios, Madison, Wisconsin.

Mastered by Tom Blain at Ultimate Audio, Madison, Wisconsin.

Executive director: John G. Schultz

The music on this disc is unedited.

*96 Gestures* composed by Scott Fields (BMI).

This compact disc has been made possible through the generous support of the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust and the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University. *96 Gestures* was composed with support from Wisconsin Arts Board fellowship.